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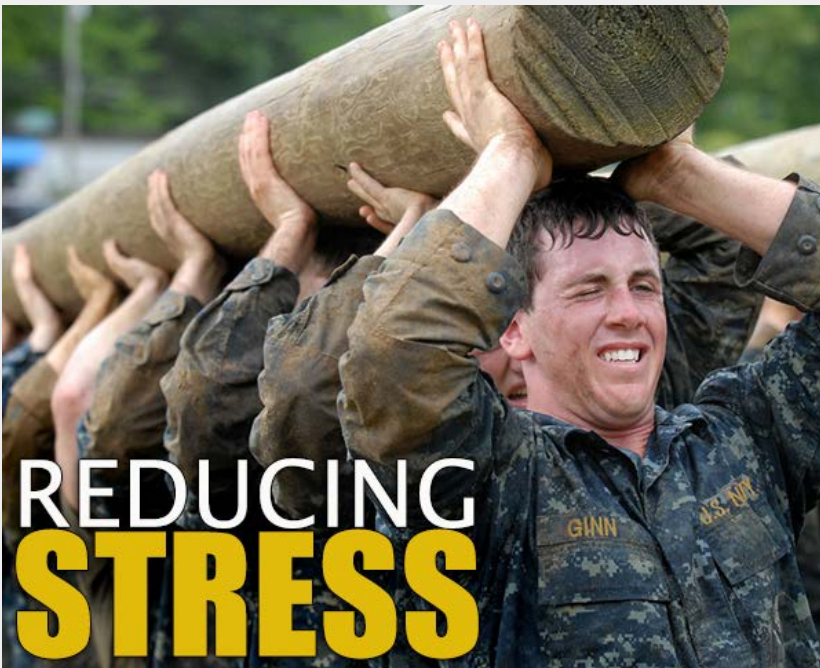
Written on JUNE 27, 2013 AT 8:26 AM by VKREMER

Stressing the Positive: Steps to Harness and Reduce Stress (Part 1 of 2)

Filed under: [FLEET AND THE FLEET MARINE FORCE](#), [HEATH](#), [MEN'S HEALTH](#)

(NO COMMENTS)

By Lt. Jesse Locke, clinical psychologist, Capt. James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center



Plebes carry a modified telephone pole during the log PT station of Sea Trials, the capstone training Academy freshmen. The plebes navigate physical and mental challenges, ranging from obstacle course group runs, damage control scenarios, and water training to challenge them individually and as a team. (Officer 2nd Class Chad Runge)

Stress and worry are not all bad! Yes, stress and worry actually have some benefits. Stress helps you feel energized and alert, and can motivate you to work harder and longer. Worry helps you stay focused on your problems long enough to allow you to come up with solutions. It also shows you and those around you that you really care for something or someone.

That being said, there is a fine line between just enough and too much stress. Knowing how stress can work for you may help you better understand when your stress has moved from helpful to problematic. It also can give you more control over your stress, so that it can work for you and not against you.

Follow these six practices and start making your stress and worry work with (not against) you:

- 1) Exercise
- 2) Take deep breaths throughout the day
- 3) Practice acceptance or "letting go of what you can't change/control.
- 4) Reduce negative thoughts
- 5) Sleep

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6) Get help if you need it

1. Exercise is the best medicine: Researchers have consistently demonstrated (since 1999) that regular exercise is as effective as taking antidepressant medications AND these benefits last! This is because when you exercise your body releases chemicals that help you feel good (without the negative side effects). Beyond the biological, exercise has a number of other benefits that can improve the overall quality of your life including:

- **Increased Confidence.** Most people who workout have goals for themselves. Meeting these goals, even small ones, can boost your self-confidence. Getting into shape can also make you feel better about how you look.
- **Distracting Yourself from Stress.** Exercise is a great distraction. It can interrupt the spiral of negative thoughts that feed stress and leave you in a more positive mood post workout.
- **Being Social.** You can join a gym and go with a friend, find a running/biking group or softball league, or join a crossfit gym (which offers an instant community). A quick Internet search for “recreational sports meetups” and the city you are near will give you many options.
- **Healthy Coping.** Working out and being active is MUCH healthier than drinking alcohol, smoking, or dwelling endlessly on problems. Get out and enjoy your life!



Sailors assigned to Southwest Regional Maintenance Center perform the two-minute push-up test as part of the fiscal 2013 cycle one Physical Fitness Assessment (PFA). The PFA is a semiannual fitness test that ensures Sailors maintain a level of physical fitness required to support the Navy’s overall mission readiness. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Christopher Pratt/Released)

2. Take deep breaths through the day: This might sound cliché, but taking SLOW DEEP BREATHS throughout the day has profound benefits. Why do you think martial arts and yoga focus on breath? It’s no accident. Also, if you are heated and frustrated (which is a perfect time to breathe) deep breathing will not make you feel instantly calm. However, if you stick with it over time deep breaths can turn down the volume on the stress level, allowing you to think more clearly and calm down quicker. The key is to stick with it! Here are the basics:

- Take a slow and full breath in through your nose, expanding your lungs to capacity, which will push the bottom of your stomach (your diaphragm) all the way out.
- Once your lungs are full (and I mean really REALLY full), slowly exhale through either your mouth or nose (at a pace where you are not losing your breath).

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- REPEAT....and REPEAT...and REPEAT.
- Stick with it!!!!

3. Practice ACCEPTANCE – “letting go of what you can’t control”: Learn to understand and accept how things are in reality. Often we expect things that are unrealistic. Having unrealistic expectations sets us up to feel frustrated and angry when things don’t go according to plan. On the other hand, accepting reality helps take the edge off the intensity of our frustration. This does not mean that we have to like or enjoy how things really are, but it does mean that we understand that things happen that are out of our control.

- It is helpful to tell yourself a neutral statement like, “it is what it is,” “go with the flow,” or “take it one day at a time.” The beauty is that these statements don’t have to be specific to the situation. They can be general and still work.

Editor’s note: Lt. Locke is a licensed clinical psychologist in the U.S. Navy. He holds a doctoral degree in clinical psychology as well as a master’s degree in sport psychology. He currently works in Recruit Mental Health for the CAPT. James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center and is the Division Officer for the Psychological Resiliency and Outreach program at Recruit Training Command.

[Part two](#) will publish June 28.

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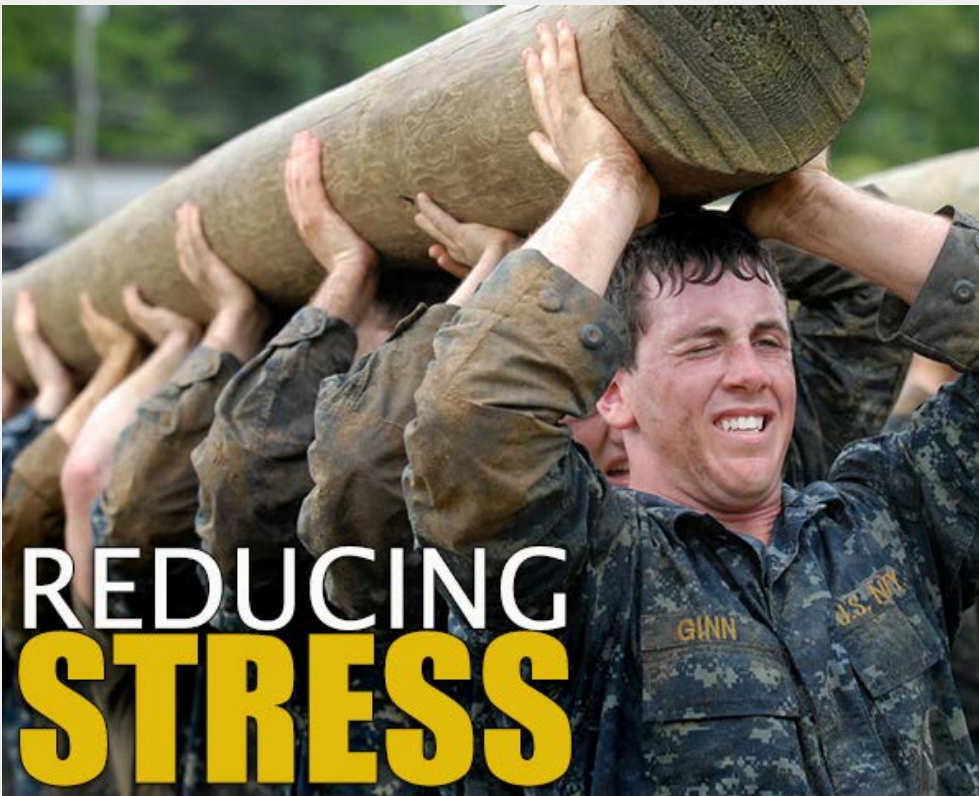
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Written on JUNE 28, 2013 AT 8:04 AM by VKREMER

Stressing the Positive: Steps to Harness and Reduce Stress (Part 2 of 2)

Filed under [CORPSMAN](#), [FORCE HEALTH AND SAFETY](#), [HEATH](#) (ONE COMMENT)

By **Lt. Jesse Locke, clinical psychologist, [Capt. James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center](#)**



Plebes carry a modified telephone pole during the log PT station of Sea Trials, the capstone training Academy freshmen. The plebes navigate physical and mental challenges, ranging from obstacle course runs, damage control scenarios, and water training to challenge them individually and as a team. (Photo by Officer 2nd Class Chad Runge)

Editor's note: As a recap, from Lt. Locke's [first blog](#) about reducing stress, here are the top six practices you can take to start making stress and worry work with you (not against) you.

- 1) Exercise
- 2) Take deep breaths throughout the day
- 3) Practice acceptance or "letting go of what you can't change/control."

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- 4) *Reduce negative thoughts*
- 5) *Sleep*
- 6) *Get help if you need it*

4. **Reduce negative thoughts:** Ask yourself: “What can I tell myself that would be accurate, positive, or helpful?” Frequently we are our own worst enemy. The things we tell ourselves are directly connected to how we feel and what we do. The key is to notice your negative thoughts. You can’t do anything about having negative thoughts if you don’t know you are having them. However, you can if you’re aware of them. For instance:

- **Notice how you feel.** If you are feeling down, frustrated, or irritated, you are probably having some pretty negative thoughts.
- **Notice the kinds of things you are doing.** Maybe you are snapping at loved ones or co-workers, maybe you are drinking more than usual, maybe you are craving junk food (if you are an “emotional eater”), or maybe your neck and shoulders are sore from being tense (this is also where tension headaches can come from).

If you can notice your feelings, behavior, and thoughts then you can decide for yourself if they are helpful or not. If you decide they are not helpful, the easiest place to make a change is in your thoughts. You have total and complete control over your thoughts in any and all situations. You might not have the same luxury with your behavior (although taking some slow deep breaths is always an option).



Boatswain’s Mate Seaman Charles Henderson takes a break before flight operations aboard the amphibious dock landing ship USS Comstock (LSD 45). Comstock, as part of the Boxer Amphibious Ready Group, and elements of the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, are underway in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of responsibility during a deployment to the western Pacific Ocean. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Joseph M. Buliavac/Released)

5. **Sleep:** Lacking sleep makes everything else in life harder. Here are some quick ways to help get you sleep back on track:

- 1) Set a bed time and shoot for it each night. This helps your body get into a rhythm.
- 2) Have a bedtime routine. This can be anything from brushing your teeth and washing your face to reading. Basically, you want to send the message to your body and brain that you are gearing up for sleep.
- 3) Try to make your bedroom as a quiet, dark, and relaxing of an environment as you can.
- 4) Use your bed for the two S’s only. Sleep and...well, you know! If you are

watching T.V., on the internet/computer, reading, or eating, STOP! The bed should be a cue for sleep, plus the light from T.V. and computer screens triggers adrenaline which keeps you up.

- 5) Avoid big meals and lots of water prior to getting in bed for the night.
- 6) Avoid stimulants like caffeine and tobacco close to bed time. This means energy drinks, coffee, some teas, cigarettes and dip/chew. In fact, quitting tobacco is the healthiest thing you can do for yourself. Plus you will smell better and save money!

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6. Getting Help if You Need It: Sometimes there are things that a professional can help us with. If something complicated is going on with your car, you would take it to a professional without a second thought. Your health and wellness is more important than your car!

The most significant road block we face as men is stigma... and it is killing us! Sometimes we put it on ourselves, maybe people have told us that getting help is negative, or society sends us subtle or not so subtle messages that men, and military men in particular, are “strong” and strong men don’t need help.

Why are we as men willing to suffer even to the point of putting ourselves in danger, ruining our relationships, and crashing our careers? Why do we allow long-term negative outcomes to take place just so we can avoid getting help and looking “weak?”

It is time to untangle the web that has held us back from noticing a problem, getting help, and moving on.

This logic does not make any sense: If I am scared of something, I avoid it so I don’t feel uncomfortable. This means I am strong. This argument (although backwards) is a common way of thinking that holds us back as men. If you face your fears (asking for help) you are being strong and courageous.

The tips above are things you can use TODAY! I challenge every one of you to incorporate one or more of these tips into your daily routine. Take a nice slow deep breath right now; see it’s not so bad. We have a lot more control than we give ourselves credit for. We can and should be proactive either in using these tips, including seeking help and support from others. The key is being willing to do something about it. Next step...take action.

Editor’s note: Lt. Locke is a licensed clinical psychologist in the U.S. Navy. He holds a doctoral degree in clinical psychology as well as a master’s degree in sport psychology. He currently works in Recruit Mental Health for the Capt. James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center and is the Division Officer for the Psychological Resiliency and Outreach program at Recruit Training Command.

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Drew
Spot on with this write-up, I absolutely feel this web site needs a great deal more attention. I’ll probably be returning to read through more, thanks for the advice!

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